

Brewery returns with help from Rural Development

Story and Photos by Kevin Tuttle, USDA Rural Development



Toward the end of the longest Main Street without a through street in the world, lies the main attraction of this small rural Wisconsin town – a brewery. A brewery that laid dormant for over 30 years; while some passersby ignored its majestic potential, perhaps laughing it off due to the asbestos, lead paint and other environmental hazards. Seeing what was once a thriving brewery for 120 years turned into an eye sore. A brewery that hadn't brewed anything in decades was headed for a collision with a wrecking ball.

"The restoration of the Potosi Brewery began in 1995 when Gary David bought the ruined Potosi Brewery buildings," according to the company's Web site. "This nearly one square block of buildings had just suffered a major fire and most of the buildings were a total loss. After working three years to rebuild parts of what had been destroyed, Gary then turned his attention to the Brewery itself.

"Being awarded the high bid at the county auction he then enlisted the help of his friend Rick Tobin and cousin Denis David. It was the marking genius of Denis and his wife, Madonna, in 1999 that brought the public on board through a community meeting. This meeting was overwhelmingly attended by the public and brought forth numerous suggestions as well as additional support. It was this gathering of the public that led to the formation of the Potosi Brewery Foundation in February 2000," the Web site stated.

"I bought the building in 1997 – it was dilapidated," Gary David said. "It closed down in 1972, so it was vacant for over 30 years. We weren't sure what to do with it, but we knew we wanted to save it from the wrecking ball. It was really a community effort to save a landmark."

The landmark not only was saved, but was transformed from a war-torn-looking building into a beautifully refurbished state-of-the-art brewery and new museum. Much of the credit to its current condition goes to the Business & Industry Guaranteed Loans provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, through Mound City Bank in Platteville.

"The purpose of the Business & Industry Guaranteed Loan program is to improve, develop or finance business, industry and employment and improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities, including pollution abatement and control," according to a USDA Rural Development fact sheet. "This purpose is achieved through bolstering the existing private credit structure through guarantee of



Potosi Brewery's refurbished exterior welcomes visitors.

quality loans which will provide lasting community benefits. It is *not* intended that the guarantee authority be used for marginal or substandard loans or for relief of lenders having such loans."

Mound City Bank's Senior Vice President, Joseph Witmer, said the reason it was enticing for his bank was 1) the Business & Industry Guaranteed Loan option USDA Rural Development offered and 2) the people leading the project.

"We have the right people behind this project," Witmer said. "Without them we wouldn't have sponsored the loan."

The original loan was for over \$2.6 million, which then

had to be adjusted due to cost overruns, something Gary David explained was an underestimation of what everything was going to cost. The adjustment was made in the form of a second loan for \$660,000, for a grand total of \$3,310,400. The rest of the \$7.5 million for the project was raised through grants and community efforts.

“We looked at many aspects of this project and the one thing that stood out was the involvement of the community. The residents of Potosi wanted their brewery back,” said Lori Wells, USDA Rural Development Wisconsin Acting State Director. “It was evident that the success of Potosi Brewery was vital to the economy of this small rural community by creating dozens of jobs and offering a place to gather for the community and tourists alike. We were pleased to be a part of this project.”

Additionally, to the surprise of Denis David, Potosi Brewery Foundation President, the American Breweriana Association (ABA) – a non-profit, tax exempt, member-owned, historical and educational corporation – chose Potosi Brewery as its latest National Brewery Museum and library in 2004.

“Milwaukee, St. Louis and Potosi,” Denis David said, shaking his head in disbelief at the comparison of the cities to the small town of just over 700 residents. “We laughed. But they said we have a plan and the support and we would be an ideal brewery for a museum.”

Now completed, the 7,000-square-foot museum has a rotating exhibit, other donated exhibits from ABA members, features interactive-video history lessons; signs and many other brewery artifacts in the three-storied museum. Also available is a gift shop stocked with memorabilia and local fresh products such as cheese and sausage.

Potosi Brewery’s restaurant/bar is impressively constructed, with a hand-carved wooden bar, made by Gary David. Its capacity is about 50 people who can all enjoy something from the menu prepared by gourmet

Left to right: Denis David, Joe Witmer, Gary David, Mic Walsh and David Fritz stand in part of the museum featuring old barrels and vehicles used in transportation in the early days of Potosi’s existence.





Steve Zuidema, Potosi Brewmaster, explains the science of brewing beer and Potosi's output capabilities.

chefs. They have four beers, including root beer, and make seasonal brews as well.

The plan is for those brews to pay off the loans.

"The beer is critical because we need revenue to sustain ourselves and we feel that's in the beer," said David Fritz, Potosi Brewery Foundation Treasurer, who signs over 50 paychecks every two weeks – spurring economic development. "The jobs that have been created are critical to Potosi and the surrounding area. Thousands of people are coming from all over the country to see the National Brewery Museum and the experience they have is exceeding their expectations."

Since June 2008, the brewery has enjoyed the company of over 30,000 visitors, sampling Brewmaster Steve Zuidema's creations and learning, or perhaps reliving, some of the history of Potosi Brewery. It is no longer a hazard, nor an eyesore; and is something the entire community relishes.



Potosi Brewery is located at 209 S. Main Street, Potosi, WI.

For more information on USDA Rural Development and its programs, visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/wi or call the Dodgeville Area Office at 608-935-2791.

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